DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 323 688 EC 232 115

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TITLE	Counseling Gifted Students.
INSTITUTION	Indiana State Dept. of Education, Indianapolis. Office of Gifted and Talented Education.; Purdue Univ., West Lafayette, IN. Gifted Education Resource Inst.
PUB DATE	Mar 90
NOTE	19p.; A monograph prepared for the Leadership Accessing Program.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Achievement Need; Career Choice; *Career Counseling; Career Development; *Counseling Techniques; Elementary Secondary Education; *Gifted; Goal Orientation; *Interpersonal Relationship; Peer Relationship; Personality Traits; *Type A Behavior
IDENTIFIERS	*Perfectionism

ABSTRACT

The guide presents techniques for counseling gifted and talented students. A section on counseling for career problems addresses: (1) multipotentiality as a possible problem in making career decisions; (2) poor career choices; and (3) inadequate course preparation. The Guidance Laboratory approach to counseling for prevention of career-related problems is described. The guide also discusses the problem of perfectionism and problems in relationships. Each problem area is described briefly, possible causes of the problem are suggested, and several strategies for prevention are presented. Includes 31 references. (JDD)

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ED323688

Counseling Gifted Students

A Monograph Prepared for the Leadership Accessing Program

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March 1990

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Introduction

This monograph by Barbara Kerr presents an excellent overview of some issues in counseling gifted and talented students and facilitating their career development. The counseling strategies presented are derived from the experience of the author in working with gifted and talented youth at the Nebraska Guidance Laboratory for Gifted in Lincoln, Nebraska; the SENG Center (Supporting Emotional Needs of the Gifted) in Dayton, Ohio; and the Honors Counseling Center in Iowa City, Iowa. The major problems discussed in this monograph are career planning and decision making, perfectionism, and social relationships. Kerr asserts that among these three problem areas the most prevalent is career planning and decision making. This may be so in part because of the multipotentiality of many gifted youth. That is, they often have a number of special talents, combined with strong interest in each, and find it hard to make the career choice which fits them best. This monograph offers a wealth of ideas for counselors and teachers and should be an invaluable guide for those who work with gifted and talented youth. The overall message is one of optimism and joy for the prospects of gifted youth.

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Brief Biography of the Author

Barbara Kerr's interest in the gifted and talented stems from her follow-up of her fellow classmates in one of the nation's first post-Sputnik schools for gifted students. Her finding that many girls do not become women of accomplishment led her to create techniques for the career development and social/emotional guidance of this population. Her techniques of guidance which will be presented are based not only on the research on gifted females, but also on the developmental experiences of eminent women as recorded in their biographies. She established the Guidance Laboratory for Gifted and Talented at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and the Honors Counseling Project at the University of Iowa. She is currently an Associate Professor of Counselor Education at the University of Iowa, where she continues to study the needs of the gifted/talented through the lifespan. Her publications include *Career Education for Gifted and Talented* and *Smart Girls, Gifted Women*, as well as many journal and magazine articles in the areas of counseling and gifted education.

Counseling Gifted and Talented Students

Introduction

Since Terman's longitudinal study of a group of 1,528 gifted individuals, it has long been assumed that gifted children almost invariably fulfill the promise of their youth (Terman & Oden, 1935, 1947). This conclusion, found in most psychology textbooks' summaries of the study, ignores the fact that Terman's highly gifted often were found to have had great difficulty translating their extraordinary intellectual ability into meaningful, productive work; that over half of the gifted women became homemakers despite earlier career aspirations; and that even those who eventually became satisfied and successful had difficulty deciding among many career options. More recent clinical case studies and research on the gifted show that the path from youthful talent to adult accomplishment is not always straight and smooth. National Merit Scholars (Watley, 1969), Presidential Scholars (Kaufmann, 1981), and graduates of major learning programs (Kerr, 1985) have all been found to have had problems in career decision-making or life planning.

There are, of course, a wide variety of possible explanations for indecision and distress among gifted adults. One missing ingredient in the development of most gifted individuals is guidance. Although special educational programs exist for about one-third of the gifted (Cox, Daniel, & Boston, 1985), few of these include a guidance component. Models exist for guiding the gifted (Betts, 1986; Colangelo & Zaffrann, 1979; Webb, Meckstroth & Tolan, 1982), but actual applications are rare. The Nebraska Guidance Laboratory for Gifted in Lincoln, Nebraska; the SENG Center (Supporting Emotional Needs of Gifted) in Dayton, Ohio; and the Honors Counseling Laboratory in Iowa City, Iowa, are among the few.

This monograph presents counseling techniques which draw upon effective strategies that have been used in these settings. Many guides for counseling the gifted are based on "predictable crises" (Blackburn & Erickson, 1986) or common characteristics of gifted children and adolescents (Webb, Meckstroth, & Tolan, 1982). The present guide is organized according to the most frequent presenting problems of gifted adults in therapy, with an eye to preventing their occurance. The major categories – career problems, perfectionism, and problems in relationships – were problems most frequently stated by adult gifted clients at the Nebraska Guidance Laboratory and the Honors Counseling Laboratory at the University of Iowa. The nature of these problems among adults has been described in detail elsewhere (Kerr, 1987); here the focus will be on the manifestations of these problems in young gifted people. In this monograph, each problem area will be described briefly, possible causes of the problem will be suggested, and several strategies for prevention will be presented. Most of this paper will be devoted to career problems because they are by far the most challenging and most frequent

concerns of gifted adults and one of the areas most neglected by counselors of gifted children and adolescents.

Multipotentiality

Multipotentiality is the most frequently observed characteristic of the gifted related to difficulties in career development (Kerr, 1981). Multipotentiality is defined as the ability to select and develop any number of competencies at a high level (Frederickson & Rothney, 1972). Gifted students and those who are concerned with the guidance of the gifted have long recognized the possession of multiple potentials as a mixed blessing. Without appropriate career guidance, multipotentiality may become a curse. Multipotential students may be straight-A high school students who insist on taking a vocational test only to learn that they are "similar" in interests and abilities to biologists, librarians, musicians, reporters, English teachers, and ministers. After graduation from high school, multipotential students may vacillate between career choices, delaying career decisions until financial need and the end of a nonfocused education drive them to take a job by default. As an adult, the multipotential gifted individual may dabble in a series of jobs, finding success but little satisfaction in any. Parents, teachers, and counselors are puzzled throughout the disappointing and spotty career of the multipotential individual. They continue to insist, "But you could be anything you want to be!" not understanding that that is precisely the problem.

What research evidence exists concerning the problem of multipotentiality? Evidence is available from several areas of investigation regarding giftedness: analyses of case studies of gifted and talented students, longitudinal studies of career patterns, and analyses of vocational interests.

Some of the best case studies demonstrating the difficulties of multipotential gifted youth were those conducted by Leta Hollingworth in the twenties. Hollingworth (1926) interviewed hundreds of gifted children during her career in an attempt to build a knowledge base in the "nature and nurture of genius." She found that, "they are typically capable of so many different kinds of success that they may have difficulty in confining themselves to a reasonable number of enterprises." Hollingworth felt that gifted students experiencing these problems had needs for understanding and guidance that were severely neglected.

The Wisconsin Guidance Institute for Talented Students provided individualized guidance for gifted students from 1957 to 1984. Many individuals of that institute and their research associates at other institutions have contributed to the definition and understanding of multipotentiality (Colangelo & Zaffrann, 1979; Frederickson & Rothney, 1972; Sanborn, 1979). Perrone, Karshner, & Male (1979), summarizing observations from the guidance of gifted young people, observed that being told that "'You can be anything you want,' somewhat negates and denies what and who they already are, placing them on a treadmill of continually becoming something beyond their immediate selves" (p. 14).

Longitudinal studies of National Merit Scholars provide important evidence for post-high school career development problems related to multipotentiality. A study of 3,089 National Merit Scholars investigated scholastic attainment, educational aspirations, stability of career choice, and clarity of long-range goals (Watley & Kaplan, 1970). Half of the scholars had changed careers once, and many were contemplating still another career. In a follow-up study of the career progress of National Merit Scholar gifted students (1,014 males and 368 females) eight years after graduation, it was found that precollege plans did not predict vocational and educational decisions (Watley, 1969).

In a study by Fox (1978), gifted boys and girls who took the Strong-Campbell Interest Inventory were compared with a nongifted group of boys and girls. Gifted students scored higher on basic interest scales of writing, mathematics, science, public speaking, and medical science. Gifted girls did not score lower on any interest scale than nongifted girls, and gifted boys scored lower only on the adventure scale, a measure of immaturity rather than career interests. Gifted students are more interested in intellectual career areas but not less interested in social, artistic, and conventional career areas than students of average ability.

The idea that vocational indecision and vacillation due to multi-potentiality may lead to difficulties in adjustment is supported by a longitudinal study by Martins and Pulvino (1975) of "consistent" and "inconsistent" superior students, with "consistent" defined as having a career similar to the one selected as a goal at graduation from high school. In 1973, the authors collected information on the current employment and vocational adjustment of a group of 86 subjects who had graduated from high school in 1963, and who had participated in the Research and Guidance Laboratory for Superior Students. Consistent and inconsistent subjects were found to differ significantly on self-control, total vocational adjustment, and job status. It appears that the consistent gifted group was better able to plan and move toward an occupational goal, was more satisfied with that goal, and achieved higher-status jobs. The inconsistent group, by switching their preferred occupational area one or more times, may have lost the time and planning needed to be as satisfied and successful as their more vocationally consistent peers. Inconsistence of vocational interests at one time, or over a period of time, may be an indication of possible difficulties with multipotentiality.

In summary, it appears that multipotentiality emerges in elementary school and high school as a diversity of abilities, achievements, and interests as evidenced by tests and in-school activities; that it may become a problem after high school as students delay and vacillate among career decisions; and that it may lead to multiple changes of career in later life.

Poor Career Choices

Possibly one of the most preventable causes of underemployment and inappropriate employment is misinformed, misguided, or just plain "wrong" career

choices. Today's gifted students make career choices based on conformity with peers, moneymaking potential, and pragmatism, like the rest of their generation (Astin, 1988). Unfortunately, the decisions they are making are often not related to interests, needs, strongly held values, or even the most finely-developed talent. Recently, Colangelo and the author studied the college major and career choices of the upper 10th, 5th, and 1st percentile scorers on ACT composites (Kerr & Colangelo, in press) and the choices of those students who scored perfectly on at least one scale of the ACT (English, Math, Social Studies, Natural Science). When given the choice of over 100 majors, the majority of gifted students were crowding into just a few: business, engineering, pre-med, pre-law, and communications. Although perfect scorers had extraordinary abilities in specific areas, only a small fraction were interested in majors in those areas. For example, only 1.6% of perfect scorers in English contemplated majors in English, only 5% of perfect math scorers planned math majors, .4% of perfect social studies scorers planned history or geography majors, and 12% of perfect natural science scorers planned to enter the "pure" (versus applied) sciences. It is difficult to achieve a perfect score on any of these scales without unusual amounts of extracurricular reading and home study. Yet these young people, who may value the study of these liberal arts and sciences above all other activities, seem to be discouraged about actually pursuing careers in these areas. In the absence of information about themselves – that is, how their talents and personalities compare with those of others – or information about the world of work, it is no wonder that gifted students choose "safe" academic majors. It is sad, though, that many of the college majors and career choices which offer the greatest possibility of intellectual stimulation are those which are ignored by those who most value and need cognitive challenge.

Inadequate Course Preparation

Many gifted individuals make inappropriate career decisions simply because they have foreclosed the opportunity to enter more sympathetic occupations by taking the wrong coursework. The most serious deficit in the course preparation of the gifted – particularly female gifted – is mathematics. Apprehension about and failure to take math courses (Sells, 1980) accounts in large part for the failure of women to enter the occupations of engineering, medicine, and the natural and physical sciences. Lack of mathematics, surprisingly, may also impede careers in the social and political sciences, economics, journalism, law, and even linguistics because of the increased use of statistics and computer applications in these areas.

Taking "easier" courses in order to keep up a grade point average or to avoid challenge also has negative consequences. The first evidence of inadequate course preparation usually is observed on achievement tests. Achievement tests vary in the degree to which they call upon curriculum-based content or more independently developed "reasoning" skills. Nevertheless, lack of instruction in more rigorous courses can have a negative effect on scores.

The ACT tests are definitely curriculum-based measures: the more courses taken in English, math, social studies, and natural sciences, the higher the score, all other things being equal (Laing, Engen, & Maxey, 1987). The types of courses taken within these areas may also have an impact: a course in western civilization is more applicable to the ACT Social Studies test than a course in family living; survey plus lab courses in biology, chemistry, and physics are more appropriate than specific "topics" courses in sciences, such as wildlife ecology. It is important to emphasize that any gains in college admissions formulae achieved through high GPA in easy courses may be offset by lower achievement test scores. Bright adolescents can easily cheat themselves out of admission to the college or university in which they are most interested.

Upon entry to college, students with course deficits may find themselves making up for the courses not taken—only this time at great expense. Too often, the expense and inconvenience of the remedy for course deficits leads bright students to choose less demanding majors or simply inappropriate majors.

Counseling Strategies

The Guidance Laboratory Approach. The Guidance Laboratory is a collection of research-based counseling interventions designed to prevent career-related problems (Kerr & Ghrist-Priebe, 1988). For multipotential students, the Guidance Laboratory offers informational assessment and counseling that culminates in commitment to a specific career goal. For the student who has stereotyped or unconsidered career choices, the Guidance Laboratory provides the challenge to explore those careers which are more likely to actualize the student's values, as well as to explore the creative synthesis of two or more career areas (e.g., arts management; music therapy; architecture professor). For the student who has deficits in course preparation, the Guidance Laboratory can offer specific information about requirements for entry into college majors and careers.

The intervention is a one-day career counseling workshop in which students participate in sex-balanced groups of 8 to 12. After the students arrive, introductions are made, and the students are informed of the day's schedule. Next, all students complete the Self-Directed Search (SDS) (Holland, 1974), the Edwards Personal Preference Schedule (EPPS) (Edwards, 1959), Thirty Values (a list of values to rank), and a short questionnaire about academic and extracurricular activities. Then they are allowed to select any part of the university to visit (e.g., the computer center or library) and are taken there by a student host. Next, they select and attend a university class related to their area of career interest. After the class visits, groups of two or three have lunch with Guidance Laboratory counselors, who discuss the morning's experiences, their school activities, and future plans. In the afternoon, students participate in individual and group counseling sessions.

The individual counseling sessions are all 50 minutes long. In these sessions the counselors follow a structured interview schedule designed to (a) clarify

interests, needs, and values; (b) indicate understanding of student concerns; (c) encourage practice in goal setting; and (d) influence students to make career decisions based on their interests, needs, and values. To accomplish the first objective, the counselors interpret the results of the SDS, EPPS, and Values ranking, helping the client to synthesize this information. The counselors are directed to demonstrate, on the basis of the test results, how each client is unique or special. The following is an example of such an interpretation:

> You have a Holland code IES – a very rare code because it combines two very different sets of personality characteristics, the Investigative personality's love of ideas, science, and analysis, and the Enterprising personality's interests in selling and persuading. In addition, the 'S' for Social in your code and your EPPS scores on Need for Affiliation (90th percentile) and Need for Exhibition (95th percentile) show that you have a special affinity for people, and being in front of people. I'll bet Carl Sagan has a profile like this – and I'll bet that you, too, would be very good at selling scientific ideas to the public. Your highest values, Knowledge and Friendship, certainly seem to fit; what do you think?

To encourage the practice of goal setting, the counselors present the clients with a Personal Map of the Future. In this exercise, they suggest that clients choose any future goal – perhaps based on the test interpretation discussion – and describe, on the Personal Map of the Future, the steps necessary to take this week, this month, this year, and thereafter to attain the goal. The counselors help the client to focus by giving information and encouragement. Finally, they help the clients to feel understood and supported by using verbal feedback and open-ended questions throughout the interview. They demonstrate their support by showing curiosity rather than ignorance when their clients discuss topics such as science fiction or organ concertos, topics about which the counselors might know very little.

All students also participate in a group life planning session with a counselor and four to seven students. The objectives of this session are to focus on specific aspects of the students' desired future life-styles and to identify barriers to and possibilities for attaining those life-styles. To accomplish these objectives, the counselor leads the students in a "Perfect Future Day" fantasy (Zunker, 1981) in which students imagine to themselves an entire working day 10 years in their own future. After the fantasy, students are led in a discussion of possibilities and barriers, with the counselor encouraging high aspirations and giving information when necessary.

The workshop ends with a short lecture reiterating the purposes of the workshop and encouraging continued career decision-making. Evaluations of the workshop are distributed, and students are given an opportunity to request additional counseling anonymously.

Perfectionism

Very few clients are likely to refer themselves to counselors for problems with perfectionism. Instead, friends and family often pressure them into counseling out of concern for, or frustration with, their tendency to be hard on themselves and others. Perfectionism has been described as a problem of gifted individuals by most of those who have studied them at close hand. Hollingworth (1926) saw perfectionism as a common characteristic of the highly gifted, Whitmore (1980) related it to fear of failure and underachievement, and Roedell (1987) has outlined the consequences. Perfectionism is defined here as a complex of characteristics and behaviors, including compulsiveness with regard to work habits, over-concern for details, unrealistically high standards for self and others, indiscriminate acquiescence to external evaluation, and rigid routines.

Possible Causes

Inherent Tendencies. Although the common-sense notion of the causes of perfectionism tends to lay the blame for the perfectionistic child squarely on "pushy," exacting parents, clinical experience shows this conclusion to be unwarranted. Many perfectionistic gifted children are the products of relaxed, easy-going parents with quite realistic expectations. Developmental psychologists have established that infants come into the world with tendencies to develop particular temperaments, differing among themselves on many variables such as activity level, sensitivity to change in the environment, reactivity, and mood. It seems possible that certain children are simply born with the combination of temperaments that creates a need for an orderly environment or, conversely, an aversion to chaos. Children born with these temperaments who are also of high intelligence may be able to carry perfectionism further than average children simply because they often have the ability to carry out tasks expected of their age level perfectly. In this way, perfectionism becomes entrenched. The *ability* to perform perfectly combines with the *need* to perform perfectly.

Lack of Awareness of Giftedness. Many gifted children are unaware of their abilities. Many gifted children have never been labeled gifted (Webb, Meckstroth, & Tolan, 1982). Even those who have received a label have seldom been given specific information about their abilities: How gifted? In which areas? In what percentile? How many other children can be expected to perform similarly? In the absence of specific information about how their intellectual abilities compare with those of others, gifted children and parents usually underestimate their abilities or assume their intelligence is "just average." When a child assumes that he or she is "just average" but consistently receives higher marks and performs age-level tasks with ease, then that child begins to search for other explanations for his or her superiority. Some attribute their success to luck. Some believe it has simply been effort—hard work. It is these latter children, who believe their superiority is purely the result of hard work, who are in danger of becoming perfectionistic.

If a child assumes that his or her superiority is only the result of effort, rather than some combination of effort and ability, it is likely that the gifted child will begin to see other children as not expending effort, not working hard enough – in short, lazy. A child who holds other children in contempt for their lack of effort grows up to be an adult with impossibly high standards for others and a warped sense of his or her own capabilities.

On the other hand, children whose gifts are identified early and who have specific explanations of their abilities ("about 95 children out of 100 can't read as well as you do; your math ability in 7th grade is about equal to that of the average 12th grader"), are likely to become comfortable with those gifts. They are also likely to have more realistic expectations of average peers and somewhat higher expectations of themselves in age-level tasks.

Extrinsic Motivation. Although more rare than believers in the "hurried child" would have it, there are parents and teachers who have made the mistake of setting up systems of rewards and/or punishments for every conceivable achievement behavior. Gifted children whose abilities have been shaped by ever-increasing contingencies or who have been pressured into performing for points, grades, and awards soon lose a sense of ownership of their talents. An over-emphasis on rewards can lead to less creative, more automatic behavior. A gifted child can develop perfectionistic behavior when he or she responds to every situation as an opportunity to gain "points." While lacking in creativity, the work of the gifted perfectionist is always precise, correct, and full of detail in order to get the hoped-for reward. Gifted perfectionists generalize their perfectionism to relationships, hobbies, and even religion, so that they seem to be trying to get an "A" in marriage, leisure, or spirituality.

Strategies for Change

The following program of behavior change, dubbed by one of the clients "Slob for a Week," was used with moderate success at a counseling center in an effort to help perfectionists undo some of their more rigid behaviors; to empathize with the plight of non-perfectionists; and to learn, indirectly, the value of prioritization of tasks.

Perfectionism Behavior Change

Contract

A. Wake Up

1. Do not set your alarm. Wake up late. If your "body clock" wakes you up, go back to sleep or read a magazine until you are genuinely late.

2. Leave one item of grooming unfinished – hair unbrushed, shirt unpressed, or clothes unmatched.

3. Skip breakfast, or grab breakfast on the way to work or school.

B. At Work/School

1. Let somebody down. Do not follow through on something that is not important to you.

2. Be late for a class or a meeting you do not care much about; do not explain; do not apologize. During the time before the meeting, read something you are really interested in, or speak to someone you really care about.

C. Lunch

1. Do not count calories or read the menu carefully.

2. Eat what most appeals to you.

3. Take a longer time for lunch than you usually allow.

D. Afternoon

1. Leave a task undone.

2. Do not return an unimportant message.

3. Leave as early as you can.

E. Dinner

1. Eat whatever is there without organizing or planning.

F. Evening

1. Let a family member down, or do not engage in some routine activity everybody assumes you will do – wash dishes, take out the garbage.

2. Do not finish your work.

3. Go to bed late; read something you care about, or do something fun; or talk to a friend until late.

G. Next morning

1. Start over.

When guided with the right proportions of humor and seriousness, this technique can help the perfectionist to gain some new insights into his or her habits. In addition, many perfectionists learn that when they are able to give up their obsession with precision, details, and outside evaluation, they are better able to focus their energies on issues of real concern to them.

Problems in Relationships

What kinds of problems in relationships are unique to gifted and talented individuals? Although gifted people experience the same societal expectations as other men and women, they do have special problems in friendships and intimate relationships that are related to their special talents. Terman and Oden (1935) found that the majority of gifted children and adolescents were well-adjusted and popular with their classmates. Although the Terman subjects married later than average Americans, they tended to have very stable marriages and well-adjusted families. Hollingworth (1926) found that the great differences in intellect between the highly gifted and average peers created difficulty in establishing friendships for this group. Kaufmann (1981), who also studied the highly gifted (the Presidential Scholars), found that they often received less recognition than their less-gifted peers. She also found that Presidential Scholars married very late compared to the national average and were virtually childless. Problems in relationships among the gifted may be related to several issues.

Peer Relationships

Webb, Meckstroth, and Tolan (1982) reviewed the major problems gifted and talented students have in peer relationships. Many of the difficulties gifted students have in peer relationships relate to their uneven development. Often, the intellectual development of gifted young people outstrips that of their same-age peers to the point that they become "group deviants": they are simply too different intellectually to be accepted by their age-mates. Webb et al. suggest that gifted children need several different peer groups that fit their different physical, intellectual, and social levels of development. They also point out that what adults consider satisfactory peer relationships may be very different from what the gifted child considers satisfactory. Pressuring gifted children to "fit in" makes them feel as if they must hide their gifts and their true selves. Too often, adults assume that a gifted child lacks social skills when in actuality the child has social skills but is choosing not to use them.

Intimate Relationships

Some difficulties in intimate relationships for the gifted are simply the result of demographics. Availability of appropriate partners becomes more problematic the greater the intellectual level or the rarer the talent. In American society, men tend to marry their intellectual equals or their intellectual inferiors. As a result, there may be fewer gifted males available for gifted females. Another perspective is

that if shared interests and values are an important basis of marriage, then gifted men and women may have to search longer for partners who share their unusual or unique interests and possibly more intellectually-oriented values. Problems in intimate relationships for gifted people also have their roots in childhood socialization and expectations. Gifted girls in particular receive mixed messages about relationships. Until adolescence they generally are rewarded primarily for achievement behaviors. As adolescence approaches, however, girls are rewarded more for their success in relationships and less for success in the classroom (Kerr, 1985). Therefore, many gifted young women become unsure whether relationship goals or academic goals should be primary. Gifted young men also seem to respond to their socialization with unrealistic expectations; despite the overwhelming number of women entering and staying in the job market, a majority of gifted young men do not want their future wives to work (Fox, 1975)! Male-female stereotypes, which are harmful to people in general, may be very harmful to gifted young men and women, whose dreams for themselves and whose needs in relationships do not conform to social norms for males and females.

Finally, gifted people experience problems in relationships when they generalize achievement-oriented behavior to relationships. That is, when a gifted individual evaluates and selects partners in terms of which one will seem to others to be the greatest achievement, problems result. Individuals who generalize achievement-oriented behaviors need help learning to separate accomplishment from intimacy.

Strategies for Change

Webb, Meckstroth, and Tolan (1982) and Kerr (1985) provide a number of suggestions for strategies for guiding gifted young people in the area of relationships. At a counseling laboratory, Zunker's (1981) role-stripping exercise was modified to help gifted students examine the roles and relationships which hold the greatest significance for them. By prioritizing their roles and processing the results, gifted students are able to explore the meaning of their relationships and to receive counseling with regard to conflicts. This exercise is presented below.

Role Stripping

The purpose of this exercise is to help you discover how your roles relate to your career goals and to help you better understand the roles that you assume. (Hand out a role-stripping sheet.)

What are your most important roles? (Some examples are: student, friend, etc.) Write down the five most important roles you presently play. List them in order of their importance to you, "1" being the most important. Now tear off each of these roles so that you have five strips of paper, each with one role on it. Do you think they are in the right order? Put them in order, with the least important role on the top of your pile.

Now each of you will give up this least important role by going around the group and individually placing this strip of paper in the middle of the table, and talking to the rest of the group about how it feels not to have this role anymore. Any questions on this procedure?

I will give up my fifth role to get us started. (Facilitator has his/her fifth role ready, and demonstrates.) (All participants give up fifth role.)

Now we will give up our fourth role . . . third role . . . second role . . . . Now we will give up our last and probably most important role. This may be difficult to do. (All participants have now given up all five roles.) Now you have given up all five roles. How does that feel?

Close your eyes for a moment and imagine yourself without these roles. What do you feel? Who are you? You may open your eyes.

In a way, we are our roles. It is the responsibilities that go with each of these roles that give meaning to our lives.

Now you may take back the roles you want. Are there any you really do not want back? You may leave them on the table if you like. Perhaps you can think of other roles you might rather have.

Now, how does it feel to have your roles back? (Elicit responses from group; not everyone need respond.)

This can be a powerful exercise. Perhaps its impact will help you when you make decisions about a career. Some of your important roles may come into conflict with a particular career you're considering, or perhaps they will reinforce the decision for you. (If anyone seems upset by this exercise, provide empathic response; ask for support from the group.)

Summary

This monograph has dealt with three major concerns of gifted and talented students. However, it must be remembered that gifted individuals encounter all of the psychological disorders experienced by the general population. Whether the incidence of psychological adjustment problems is higher or lower among the gifted than among the general population is still a subject of much debate. Nevertheless, common problems such as depression and anxiety among gifted clients should never be considered separately from giftedness. It is often said that a gifted child is a child first and then gifted, but this misses the mark in that intellectual giftedness and its attendant isolation and stresses are so often part of the problem.

Delisle (1986) has shown the dangers of ignoring the stresses of giftedness in his essay on suicide and the gifted. Counselors who wish to be helpful to the gifted must first make a sincere effort to understand the special characteristics of this population. They must be willing to try creative strategies for preventing and intervening in the problems of gifted young people. An understanding of the needs of the gifted and talented throughout their lifespan, together with a readiness to synthesize new approaches, makes it possible to help bright young people fulfill their promise.

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